

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHC PRIORITY 1637

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 2678

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PINS VE
SUBJECT: NEW INFORMATION MINISTER SWORN IN

REF: CARACAS 2646

1. PRESIDENT PEREZ PUBLICLY ACCEPTED THE THREE-WEEK-OLD RESIGNATION OF DIEGO ARRIA ON MARCH 18 AND DESIGNATED CELESTINO ARMAS AS THE NEW MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND TOURISM. ARRIA'S RESIGNATION IS ANOTHER STEP PRECEDING THE IMMINENT PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WILL ENTER THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL RACE AS AN INDEPENDENT CANDIDATE. (REFTEL).

2. BIO DATA ON CELESTINO ARMAS: ARMAS WAS BORN IN BARCELONA, ANZOATEGUI STATE IN DECEMBER 15, 1935. HE RECEIVED HIS SECONDARY SCHOOLING IN CARACAS AND LATER TOOK A DEGREE IN MINING ENGINEERING FROM CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF CARACAS. FROM 1964-65, HE STUDIED AT THE COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES RECEIVING A MASTERS DEGREE IN MINING ENGINEERING IN 1965. HE WORKED AS A MINING ENGINEER FOR SIDOR (VENEZUELA'S NATIONAL STEEL CORPORATION) IN THE EARLY 60'S, LATER FOR THE MINISTRY OF MINES AND HYDROCARBONS (1966-69) AND WAS DESIGNATED AS DIRECTOR OF THE SCHOOL OF MINES, METALLURGY AND GEOLOGY AT THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY OF CARACAS IN 1970. IN 1973 HE WAS
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ELECTED AS A FEDERAL DEPUTY (ON THE AD PARTY TICKET) FOR THE FEDERAL DISTRICT. WHILE IN CONGRESS, HE HAS SERVED AS A MEMBER OF FINANCE COMMITTEE, AND AS ACTING CHAIRMAN OF THE MINES AND HYDROCARBONS COMMITTEE OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES. HE IS ALSO A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL POLITICAL COMMITTEE OF AD AND UNTIL HIS MINISTERIAL APPOINTMENT, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE

NATIONAL ELECTORAL STRATEGY COMMISSION FOR AD PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ. ARMAS IS MARRIED. HE SPEAKS ENGLISH WELL, AND ALSO HAS STUDIED A BIT OF FRENCH.

3. COMMENT: ARMAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE FOR AD IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES DEBATE ON THE OIL NATIONALIZATION BILL. SINCE HIS ELECTION TO CONGRESS, HE HAS RISEN RAPIDLY IN THE PARTY ORGANIZATION. ALTHOUGH ARMAS WAS A SUPPORTER OF CARLOS CANACHE MATA FOR AD SECRETARY GENERAL IN 1976, AND BACKED THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY OF JAIME LUSINCHI IN 1977, HE HAS SUBSEQUENTLY MOVED TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN THE CAMPAIGN OF THE AD PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ. ARMAS IS POLITICALLY AMBITIOUS, AND HIS MOVES ARE CALCULATED TO ADVANCE HIS OWN POLITICAL FORTUNES. HE GIVES EVERY APPEARANCE OF BEING "COMER" IN AD. HE IS REPORTEDLY CLOSE TO AND TRUSTED BY PRESIDENT PEREZ. VAKY

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